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**From:** Elizabeth Erwin [Erwin.ElizabethLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]  
**Sent:** 5/31/2012 7:38:29 PM  
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**Subject:** NEWS UPDATES: Study finds flame retardant in food (Greenwire)

## Study finds flame retardant in food

Jeremy P. Jacobs, E&E reporter

Published: Thursday, May 31, 2012

A common flame retardant has been found in peanut butter, poultry, fish, beef and other fatty food products, according to a study published today.

At issue is the flame-retarding chemical hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD), which has been linked to reproductive problems, neurotoxic effects in children and hormonal disruption.

The researchers found HBCD at levels below federal standards, but they argued that the mere presence of the chemical in food is alarming.

"Flame retardants should not be in food that we eat in the United States," said Arnold Schechter of the University of Texas School of Public Health, who co-authored the study with National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Director Linda Birnbaum.

The study, which appears in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, surveyed 36 food products purchased at a grocery store from 2009 to 2010. They found the highest levels in fish, particularly in canned sardines, which have a high fat content.

HBCD is a persistent organic pollutant that can bioaccumulate in the food chain. It is used in polystyrene foams in home insulation as well as on electrical equipment. The European Chemicals Agency is considering adding it to its list of substances of high concern. U.S. EPA has proposed an "action plan" for HBCD and sought to add it to a "chemicals of concern" list, but that proposal is stalled at the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Schechter said the study is part of a broader look at flame retardants in food. The "good news," he said, is that the levels of HBCD detected are low, but the "bad news" is that it is just one flame retardant that may be present in these foods.

"To the best of my knowledge, no one knows the effects of the mixtures of chemicals," he said. "Government standards now are set for one chemical at a time. They know this is not the real world. The real world contains mixtures of toxic chemicals."

The study comes at a time of increased scrutiny of flame retardants. A recent *Chicago Tribune* investigation revealed steps allegedly taken by the flame-retardant industry to ensure its substances are required for household products. The industry tactics allegedly included public health groups and manipulated scientific data.

The chemical industry pushed back at the research, noting the foods tested were not picked at random but were selected based on previous studies.

"Based on these findings, the real story is that HBCD was not detected in the majority of the samples and in those where it was, it was well below levels where one might see adverse health effects," the American Chemistry Council said in a statement. "The authors themselves note that human exposure from the foods that were studied is well below critical effect levels identified by the European Union; therefore these results should not pose a concern for human health."

But Sonya Lunder, an analyst at the Environmental Working Group, said the report underscores that many chemicals are working their way into commonly consumed food.

"This is just one of several types of persistent bioaccumulative toxins this university team has measured in food samples," Lunder said. "We are contaminating our food chain with chemicals that are long-lasting in the environment and harmful to our health. We need to stop this."

An unanswered question, though, is how these chemicals are getting into food.

Researchers speculate the chemicals may come from dust that contaminates the food during preparation or transport. Another theory is that HBCD in soil is transferrable to vegetables, which is then eaten by animals.

Schechter also suggested that fish may be exposed to the chemicals because they build up in sediment at the bottom of water bodies. He also noted that farm-raised fish tend to have higher levels of the chemicals, suggesting something in the feeding process may play a role.

Asked what consumers should do to avoid the chemicals, Schechter offered this advice: "We can eat more fruits and vegetables and less animal fats."

[Click here](#) to read the study.

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